



Dunchurch Hall taken by Bruce Sharman 2009

**G**ARDENS are an important aspect when moving to an English Courtyard or Beechcroft Trust property, many coming with a lifetime of gardening expertise and looking forward to the enjoyment without the physical effort. The gardens complement the buildings with a living and changing setting across the seasons. They incorporate a variety of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants giving a range of colour, texture and interest for all. Most have won awards. The management of the grounds is one of our most important tasks and they need to be easy to maintain. When they are newly developed they may be thickly planted to get an instant effect, but this requires a regime of regular pruning, thinning and maintenance to keep everything looking fine. Occasionally shrubs have to be cut right down to be rejuvenated and this can look a bit drastic, but is necessary for their longevity. Regular formative pruning can almost double the life of a shrub and help it keep its shape and form. After fifteen or twenty years many shrubs will be in need of replanting, which can be expensive.

All our gardens vary in their size and complexity, often



depending on the history of the site. Some were created from large country house gardens, others from farms or engineering works. They may have a formal lawn in the centre, a water feature or meadow. Whatever their size and style, their maintenance is a labour of love. Whilst Beechcroft Trust has generally employed contractors to do its gardening, English Courtyard has used its courtyard managers, guided and trained by two part-time qualified landscape managers. In the future these landscape managers will also be able to advise Beechcroft Trust secretaries on pruning, lawn care and other horticultural matters.

## Annual meetings and the merger

As this issue is being prepared, we have just completed all the annual meetings. Meetings during October are normal for The English Courtyard, but represent a change for The Beechcroft Trust where they have taken place in the summer after the start of the new budget year and the completion of the annual audit. This time, with both companies adopting the same financial year matching the calendar year, these meetings were arranged prior to the start of the new budget year which begins on 1 January 2010. Audited accounts for 2009 will be available in the first quarter of 2010.

Annual meetings, chaired by a director, are an essential part of our relationship with residents and owners. Although principally arranged to review budgets and service charge issues, they provide the opportunity to raise a myriad of other matters of interest and concern. From gardening to window cleaning, resales to sinking funds, every topic is covered. These meetings are important not just in gauging how well the management is delivering the services residents expect, but also in stimulating new ideas and initiatives such as, this year, on eco issues.

The emphasis for the 2010 budgets has been to ensure that service charges are tightly controlled bearing in mind the economic recession and, whilst every development has its own unique requirements, we have generally been successful in either lowering them or keeping increases below 1.5%. Next year we should be able to report more precisely on the financial and service benefits which should start to accrue from the merger.

During the last round of meetings, we commented on the progress of the merger which will be completed at the end of this year. In particular, we announced details about the new regional structure, which will replace the existing English Courtyard and Beechcroft Trust arrangements. With developments spread widely across twenty-one counties, we will operate as four regions, each one under the direction of an experienced regional manager who will report to either Charles Clayton or Sharon Taylor at our head office in Watlington.

The new regions integrate the management of all Courtyard and Trust developments and should ensure a consistent level of services across the board. The regional managers are located generally in home based offices within the region, making communication and availability easier. Their role is to assist the courtyard managers and secretaries, providing them with support and quicker decision making. They will also be available by appointment to discuss any matters of concern with owners during their regular visits.

Whilst there is some overlap in counties, in broad terms the regions and regional managers are: Christopher Mackenzie-Beevor (Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire), Julie Ellames (Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire), Nicky Meads (Cheshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire) and Peter Blois (Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Essex, Surrey, Sussex, Kent).

## EDITORIAL

The merger of The Beechcroft Trust and The English Courtyard Association made good progress throughout the year plans are all in place and it will be completed in December. The annual meetings in October have shown strong support by owners for the merger – and much is now expected.

Almost alone amongst our European peers, the UK remains in recession; but there are signs of optimism and we have definitely seen an improvement in property sales as the year progressed. A selection of properties for sale can be seen in the property section, including one in Cambridgeshire which won a 2009 *Daily Mail* Property Award. All these matters are discussed in this issue.

## ☀️☀️ SUMMER EVENTS ☀️☀️

It takes more than an average summer to prevent us enjoying ourselves and our surroundings. From June to September there were garden parties, barbecues and soirées - some established years ago as annual events. Berrow Court in Worcestershire had a particularly active summer, commencing with participation in a music society event in June, success in the Heart of England Bloom competition in July, harvesting plums, apples, pears and all manner of vegetables from the orchard and allotments, and culminating in an end of summer party in late August.

Busy though this seems, it is by no means unusual. We heard of events in other places and we are sure that there were many more. The outdoor backdrop of courtyard gardens provides just the right environment for summer activities, where friends, family and neighbours can be entertained. Being part of the wider community is also important, as happened at Carysfort Close which participated in the village open garden day. The gardens at Bearwater, which won last year's Hungerford in Bloom competition, continued their success this year with a commendation.



Andrew King and his father have cared for the gardens at Bearwater for nearly 25 years

## Eco questions

There were frequent questions at owners' meetings this year about insulation, solar panels and other eco issues. New developments tend to lead the way in introducing new technology, but that is no excuse for us to do nothing and so we will be asking our regional managers to act as an eco-advisory group. Most of the new technologies are not cost effective, but things are changing all the time and we will endeavour to be well informed and able to pass on information, whether it is about replacement heating appliances, grants for roof insulation or water harvesting and composting.



The evidence of global warming

18th Century 1900 1950 1970 1980 1990 2010

## A selection of some of the best retirement properties for sale

As a number of property commentators have said, it is easier to predict the behaviour of the property market over the next five years than it is for the next twelve months. Depending on which newspaper you read, or which day you read it on, there are reports of monthly price rises or predictions of further falls. However, there is one indisputable fact, and that is that the supply of homes is insufficient to meet the demand, particularly for quality retirement property, and therefore in time prices will inevitably rise.

Cognatum Property has seen an improving market since early spring, with sales across all regions. This year we are also marketing new properties at developments in Beaconsfield, Minchinhampton and Elton, the latter scheme winning the 2009 *Daily Mail* Property Award for the best retirement development in Cambridgeshire (see right).

Whilst sales interest began to slow in October, we expect the winter lull to be followed by more activity in the New Year, as renewed confidence encourages more people to stop delaying their move and enter the market. The Nationwide house index continues to show a rise in prices with a 0.9% increase in September following a 1.4% rise in August.

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### 17 Carysfort Close, Elton, Cambridgeshire

Brand new two-bedroom first-floor apartment with superb views across open countryside.

£275,000



### 11 Bramley Grange, Bramley, Surrey

Spacious two-bedroom second-floor apartment with balcony and garaging – large garden with swimming pavilion

£325,000



### 2 The Playing Close, Charlbury, Gloucestershire

Two-bedroom cottage with conservatory and walled garden, close to the heart of this market town with its Brunel station.

£385,000



### 14 Dunchurch Hall, Dunchurch, Warwickshire

A delightful two-bedroom cottage with terrace and adjacent garage – overlooking a walled garden.

£275,000



### 5 Muskerry Court, Rusthall, Tunbridge Wells, Kent

Two-bedroom first-floor apartment with south-facing balcony overlooking parkland – close to local shops.

£395,000



### 21 Churchfield Court, Girton, Cambridgeshire

Two-bedroom ground-floor apartment with large terrace garden – unspoilt views overlooking the adjoining meadow.

£350,000



### 29 The Orchard, Fairford, Gloucestershire

Two-bedroom cottage with conservatory, garage and swimming pavilion in this historic Cotswold town.

£350,000



### 18 Northmill Place, Halstead, Essex

Two-bedroom cottage with wonderful open-plan conservatory/living room – within walking distance of town centre.

£275,000



### 4 Church Leat, Downton, Wiltshire

Attractive three-bedroom cottage with conservatory and garage – overlooking a mill stream known as the Barford Carrier.

£385,000



### 17 Bearwater, Hungerford, Berkshire

Two-bedroom lakeside cottage with conservatory – set in five acres on the River Dun with private bridge leading into the centre of town.

£350,000



### 17 Hayes End Manor, South Petherton, Somerset

Three-bedroom stone-built cottage with terrace and garage – with views over the gardens towards Ham Hill.

£325,000